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Vietnam 9/15/92

THE IMPACT OF REDUCTIONS OF U.S. FORCES ON  
INTELLIGENCE IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

The Problem

1. A subject of considerable concern and discussion within the Agency for the past two years has been the probable impact of the withdrawal of U.S. forces from South Vietnam on the community's intelligence collection and analysis capabilities. Numerous efforts have been made to encourage our military colleagues to focus on this critical problem area early in the game so that orderly and systematic steps would be in train to insure that priority intelligence needs would be met as the inevitable drawdown progressed. The matter has been the subject of extensive debate and soul searching on the intelligence side, both here and in the field by military and civilian alike, but without satisfactory resolution with the drawdown of theater assets proceeding at a merry pace dictated by politically instructed logisticians. Attempts, over time, to determine the exact degree of degradation of intelligence activities have gone for naught since the pace and magnitude of withdrawal has been known only to the operational side of the military house.

The Need for Intelligence Continues

2. As the U.S. presence in Vietnam has dwindled, the quality and quantity of U.S. intelligence has, perforce, deteriorated

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and, on its current course, will inevitably continue to do so. There has been, however, no matching reduction in the type and volume of information our top level customers expect the intelligence community to be able to provide. This is eminently clear from the types of questions asked and the papers requested by the White House on a whole host of significant subjects pertaining to the Indochina War. The latter, thus, are heading for a rude shock, if we do not give clear warning that further degradations are coming. The collectors -- not the asset trimmers -- will almost certainly be the ones blamed for it even though the White House has already been alerted to these problems. Its concern has been reflected in General Haig and Messrs. Odeen and Stearman's queries to our Chief of Station, Vietnam, in April and again in July of this year on the impact of U.S. withdrawal on intelligence.

Views from Near and Far

Headquarters Concern--

3. In February 1972, Headquarters conveyed its concern to Vietnam Station that the quality of U.S. intelligence on Vietnam would, in some cases, deteriorate as U.S. presence was reduced. It was emphasized that there were no complaints regarding clandestine reporting, either from unilateral or liaison sources or other facets of the Station's collection and reporting activities, which, indeed, had retained its high quality. Headquarters analysts, however, were already feeling the pinch of the reduced flow of the

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types of intelligence which had in the past come to headquarters through American channels other than the Agency. The Station was asked to provide its views on the scope of the problem and any recommendations it believed appropriate on various points raised on collection in Vietnam. The situation in the countryside, ARVN military operations and effectiveness, the Viet Cong Infrastructure and enemy logistics activities were cited as examples of the types of subjects on which information had been available from U.S. military sources, i.e. advisors, captured documents (CDEC) and materiel (CMEC) and prisoners and ralliers (CMIC), who will no longer be in-country.

The View of Some Military--

4. Despite the White House's seemingly unquenchable thirst for high quality intelligence on Indochina, the parochial question frequently raised by the military has been to what extent intelligence of the scope and quality of that collected in the past is necessary in the face of reduced U.S. commitments in Vietnam and the apparent intent to reduce the U.S. role in that part of the world. The military's view has consistently been that once U.S. forces are no longer involved in Vietnam, there is little need for intelligence in depth on that area. This attitude was clearly evident during the discussions in February pertaining to the revision of SIGINT reporting requirements and the resulting fact-finding trip through Southeast Asia this March. This thinking has

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not been limited only to the military as other parts of the intelligence community have also espoused this reasoning.

Vietnam Station's View--

5. The headquarters and field discussions and cable traffic generated by the February exchange and during and after the March trip, however, led Vietnam Station to state its view (quite pointedly) that "the trouble with any number of recent planning papers is that they tend to assume that the end of U.S. ground combat operations in South Vietnam can be equated with the end of U.S. interest in the survival of an independent non-communist South Vietnam---. As the current offensive once again shows, as long as the North Vietnamese can move from sanctuary positions, air

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